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AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION: STATE ORGANIZATIONS FOR AGRICULTURE AND FARMERS' INSTITUTES

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Perhaps no other offices concerned with the public business of various states include so wide a range of activities, duties, aims, and methods as do the state organizations for agriculture. One state commissioner of agriculture says of his department:

If I were asked to supply a name, it would be called the Dumping Ground for a Legislature to place all subject-matter that body finds necessary to frame into law.

The justice of this observation will be more readily appreciated by reference to the following constitutional provisions for his office:

He shall perform such duties in relation to agriculture as may be prescribed by law, shall have supervision of all matters pertaining to the public lands under regulations prescribed by law, and shall keep the Bureau of Immigration. He shall also have supervision of the State Prison, and shall perform such other duties as may be prescribed by law.

Some state organizations for agriculture have even a wider range of duties. On the other hand, there are some in which the duties of this office are limited to the supervision of the state agricultural college, or to the management of the state fair.

There are five forms of organization. The first includes those organizations known as "Departments" and consists of a commissioner and one or more assistants. The second form comprises the boards, which are composed of a varying number of members, some appointed by the governor and others being members of the board by virtue of their official position in the state. The third includes bureaus which are essentially the same as the boards. The fourth form is a combination of the first and second; the regular department is supervised by a board of agriculture. The fifth and final form is that known as the Michigan organization, under which

the state board of agriculture is merely a board of trustees for the state agricultural college (102, p. 328).¹

In about half the states the administrative officer is chosen by popular vote; in the rest he is appointed by the governor or chosen by the members of the board. Being thus a political office in some instances, the position as secretary or commissioner of agriculture is more or less on a political basis, and therefore fails properly to fulfil the purpose for which it was intended, viz., to promote the agricultural interests of the state. It is the purpose of this article to sum up the work now being done by the various state departments, and by the state farmers' institutes in promoting agricultural education, particularly in elementary and secondary schools.

In one-half of the states the farmers' institutes are conducted under the direct or indirect control of the state organizations for agriculture; in the other half they are conducted by the state agricultural colleges. Since the methods and aims of all farmers' institutes are essentially the same in both groups, those under state supervision and those under state agricultural college supervision will be considered in the second part of this discussion. As might be expected, the attitude of the various state organizations for agriculture is favorable toward agricultural education in the public schools. In many reports of secretaries or commissioners of agriculture much emphasis is placed upon the importance of recognizing agriculture as a school subject. The following extract is typical:

The Department has continued its efforts to impress upon the people of the state the importance and necessity of agricultural and industrial instruction in the public schools. These schools should fit for vocation. The population of this and other states is continually increasing, and in order for the farms to meet this increase there must be a more intelligent system of agriculture. This can best be brought about by teaching the principles of agriculture in the public schools. The farmer has a business to be studied and learned. It needs a trained mind as much as any other occupation. Let us educate our boys who are to be farmers of the future, for that work. Specific training of a practical kind is a necessity for the

¹ The references are to the bibliography at the end of this article or to bibliographies in other articles of this series.

coming occupants of our farms, as well as those engaged in mechanical industries. The most valuable asset of the state is her children. They should be trained to high ideals of every day living and to high efficiency in their respective vocations (103, p. 11).

At the annual meetings of boards of agriculture of several states agricultural education receives attention, special addresses being given on this subject and published in the proceedings (104, 105, 106, 107).

Special bulletins or leaflets are published and distributed by a few state offices of agriculture. The Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture has issued from time to time leaflets on elementary agriculture and nature-study. The New York State Department of Agriculture publishes annual reports of the state Experiment Station at Cornell University. These contain reprints of various nature-study, rural school, and teachers' leaflets sent out from Cornell University, and also accounts of the extension work in agriculture and nature-study conducted by the university among the schools of the state. The Missouri State Board has recently published a bulletin on elementary agriculture meant to be used "only as the first year's work," and "written on the supposition that neither teacher nor pupils know much of scientific agriculture" (108).

About half of the states hold annual state fairs under the management of the state offices of agriculture. In nearly all, there is a department of education in which prizes are offered for school exhibits. Some give special encouragement to agricultural subjects. The prizes aggregate a few dollars in some fairs to several hundred in others.

The Nebraska State Fair offered "to the Nebraska boy under eighteen years of age, growing the largest yield of corn from one acre of ground, in the year 1910, \$50; second, \$25; third, \$20; fourth, \$15; fifth, \$10; and to the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh, \$5 each."

The South Dakota State Fair made the boys' and girls' contests a special feature at its recent meeting. Three hundred and fifty dollars were offered in cash prizes, the largest first

prize being one hundred dollars. The contest was announced in a special bulletin containing instructions as to the details of preparation for the contests (109).

One of the most popular buildings at the last Minnesota State Fair was the Agricultural Hall Annex which was devoted entirely to the exhibits in agriculture, household arts, and manual training of the ten high schools receiving state aid for teaching these subjects.

The Oklahoma State Fair of 1910 has arranged for a school of agriculture to be held on its grounds. Each county is entitled to two delegates, one hundred and fifty-four boys being provided for. "This work will be done at the fair grounds. The boys and instructors will sleep in a large tent." A portion of each day is to be devoted to instruction, lectures in the mornings and object-teaching or laboratory work in the afternoons (110). A similar school for boys is conducted by the Illinois State Fair.

Contests, for example, corn contests, are held in some states under the direction of the state office of agriculture. Such contests are being held in Missouri this year all over the state, and a Farm Boys' Encampment is conducted under the same management. In South Carolina contests have been held throughout the state under the joint direction of the State Department of Agriculture and the United States Demonstration Work. In the state contest which is soon to take place over three thousand boys are enrolled. The winner of last year's contest, Bascomb Usher, raised on one acre one hundred and fifty-two and one-half bushels of corn. The average production of corn per acre for the entire state was about eighteen bushels. A number of other southern states are conducting similar co-operative contests.

South Carolina, through its Department of Agriculture, has been aiding the practical teaching of agriculture in a few high schools by maintaining a skilled teacher and operating a farm and practice garden in connection with the school (111). The commissioner says:

This has been in the nature of an experiment, but we have gone far enough in the matter to see that admirable results may be obtained, and

at a very minimum of cost. The only cost, in fact, to us is the salary of the man nine months in the year. The land is furnished by the patrons of the school, as are also the work animals, implements, fertilizers, etc., and the school is given the profits from the farm.²

These are typical examples of the work of various state offices of agriculture in promoting an interest in agriculture and rural life among boys and girls. Many others might have been given. It is a new field of activity for these offices, and promises much if organized and extended so as to co-operate with other educational efforts. Perhaps the greatest value of such work for agricultural education to the public schools lies in placing the stamp of official approval upon this kind of education.

In many states practically nothing has been done by these offices, and in none more than a beginning of what might be done. The state fair, for example offers unusual educational opportunities. If the same energy now expended in managing and controlling amusement-park features of these fairs (which are of doubtful value at best) were directed toward helping the schools of rural communities there might be a great educational gain for the state.

STATE FARMERS' INSTITUTES

The farmers' institute movement in the United States has now reached a degree of importance and development that places it along side of the leading institutions of the country organized in the interest of industrial education. Forty-five states and territories held institutes in 1905, aggregating 10,555 half-day sessions, which were attended by 995,192 persons, chiefly adults (112, p. 7).

The growth of this movement may be seen by comparing the above summary for 1905 with the following summary for 1908: number of institutes 4,643; half-day sessions 13,056; attendance 2,098,268. In addition to the regular institutes included in the above a number of special institutes were held with an attendance of 340,414, which, added to the attendance at the regular institutes, make a total of 2,438,682. There is

²Quoted from private letter.

no record of attendance of 732 meetings of women's institutes, of 174 meetings of boys' institutes, or of several other meetings which might be regarded as farmers' institutes (113).

The function of the farmers' institute is to educate the people on their own ground. It is a phase of extension work that carries education directly to the localities in which the people live. It deals less with individual men on their farms than with small communities or groups of men; it therefore has the opportunity to exert great influence in developing the social life of rural neighborhoods (102, p. 462).

With these aims on the one hand, and with an attendance of over two million on the other, farmers' institutes become a factor in rural education second only to the public schools. Although the institutes are intended for adults it must be remembered that adults are patrons of the rural schools, and wherever the farmers' institute arouses the adult population to a realization of a need for better schools, improvement in these schools is likely to follow.

In 1896 the American Association of Farmers' Institute Workers was organized and has held annual meetings ever since. This association is a sort of clearing-house for exchange of ideas and methods, and is intended also to secure a more or less uniform type of institute in the several states. In 1898 the association requested the secretary of the Department of Agriculture at Washington to arrange for a division in connection with the department to be known as the Division of Farmers' Institutes. This request was subsequently granted by establishing the office of Farmers' Institute Specialist.³

The general policy of farmers' institutes is influenced greatly by the association and by the office of Farmers' Institute Specialist. At the meeting for 1908, the

subjects for discussion in the general program were mainly directed toward defining the status of the farmers' institute in its relation to other forms of agricultural education. The points brought out were that the farmers' institute occupies the position of field agent for agricultural education; that it provides a most efficient channel for carrying agricultural information directly to the farmer who is unable to leave his occupation to go to school;

³ The work of this office was referred to in the first article of this series, *Elementary School Teacher*, November, 1909, pp. 101-9.

and that it should broaden its work until it embraces other more advanced forms of educational work and extend its efforts until all rural people have full opportunity to enjoy its benefits (113, p. 293).

Farmers' institute workers are further assisted by state meetings where they gather together to plan the year's work. Here the policy for the work of the whole state is determined. In many of these meetings the relation of the institute to the public schools receives attention, and methods for assisting the introduction of agriculture and other rural-life subjects into the rural schools are discussed.

The following extracts of letters from some state directors or superintendents of farmers' institutes will indicate more definitely what these institutes are doing in this matter:

In connection with the Farmers' Demonstration Train we always send preliminary notice to the schools where the train is scheduled to stop, inviting them to have their pupils visit the train (Cal.).

At our annual conference of institute workers, the question of the relation of the school and church to the farm and rural life receives due consideration. The result is that an atmosphere favorable to the development of the schools along practical lines is pretty generally diffused (Ind.).

The farmers' institute lecturers have encouraged institute patrons to insist in their respective counties that agriculture be taught in the public schools (Md.).

Not only is this subject discussed by many of the lecturers, but at a large number of the institutes special speakers upon this and allied subjects are provided (Mich.).

For two years we have been giving lectures in agriculture and allied subjects in the high schools of the state; last year to the extent of eighty. Plans are nearly perfected for increasing this line of work the coming season, giving lecture courses consisting of four lectures in each of such schools as apply for them (Mont.).

We have several speakers who lecture before evening sessions of farmers' institutes on such subjects as: agriculture in the rural schools, domestic science in the rural schools, value of agricultural education, etc. (Neb.).

Each of the four corps of institute lecturers is accompanied by a representative of the Educational Department who arranges for special sessions in the public schools in connection with institutes where he can secure co-operation of the local school authorities. At these special sessions the farmers' institute lecturers give talks on elementary agriculture and nature-

study. The total attendance at these special sessions held during the school periods amounted to 22,697 (N.Y.).

When we are holding an institute in a town we very often send the lecturers to the schools to speak to the school children on certain phases of farm life (N.D.).

No instructions are given institute lecturers regarding this work; however, at many institutes teachers and pupils are called to the meeting and special lectures are given them (Okla.).

We are trying to give a good deal of attention to the introduction of agricultural education in the public schools. I have attended ten teachers' institutes during the summer with this object in view, speaking at some of them three times, and I think the subject has been discussed by some person in every institute in the state (S.D.).

Our farmers' institute instructors do what they can to promote and encourage the teaching of agriculture in the rural schools. Many of them have lectures upon this subject (W.Va.).

For the last twenty-four years a great deal of attention has been given to the discussion of agricultural education in the public schools of Wisconsin by the farmers' institute workers of this state; in fact, we feel that public sentiment among farmers has been developed by these discussions until Wisconsin has, we think, a little more practical agriculture in her schools, from the rural district up through the county agricultural schools and the agricultural college, than has any other state in the Union (Wis.).

In most states where the farmers' institute is conducted by the agricultural college there is a close correlation between this department and that of agricultural extension. In some colleges they are practically identical. As has been indicated in a previous article of this series special provision has been made by several colleges for extension work among the schools.⁴ Where this arrangement obtains, the farmers' institute workers merely co-operate with those engaged in the work among the schools, and do not initiate any work themselves.

From what has been presented concerning the organization and work of the farmers' institutes it will be seen that they have been a considerable factor in the movement for agricultural education in the public schools, first, by arousing favorable sentiment among the farmers, and second, by direct help to teacher and pupils.

⁴ *Elementary School Teacher*, February, 1910, pp. 277-86.

While these institutes will doubtless continue to encourage the introduction of agriculture into the public schools and emphasize the importance of re-directing rural schools, in many states, and soon in all the agricultural states, the demands of the rural schools for help along industrial lines will require some special attention not now provided.

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A brief general account is given, followed by short sketches of the various state organizations.

103. "Agricultural Education," A. W. GILMAN, *Seventh Annual Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Maine* (1908), 11-12.
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104. An Address—no title, P. G. HOLDEN, *Annual Report of the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture* (1909), 112-37.

A stenographic report of an address supposed to be upon corn but a considerable portion of it relates to rural education, and offers many valuable suggestions on this subject.

105. "Some Rural Problems," WALLACE, *ibid.* (1910), 124-39.

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106. "Rural Education," A. C. TRUE, *Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture* (1907), 231-36.

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